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ABSTRACT

Data on student retention at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, are analyzed. The retention rate of full-time freshmen for each of the past five years is presented versus the projected effects of achieving the institutional enrollment goal each year until 1986. Retention increased by only .1 of 1 percent in 1980 as compared to just over 2 percent in 1979. The full-time students of the fall, 1975 freshman class are traced through five years of enrollment. After one year, 67.2 percent were re-enrolled; after two years, 51.2 percent were still enrolled, and 33.1 percent of the students eventually graduated within an elapsed time of five academic years. Comparative retention data are presented for freshman minority students. The retention rate of full-time minority freshmen dropped from 72 percent in fall, 1976 to 44 percent in fall, 1978, and the retention rate was 52 percent in fall, 1980. The retention rates for different departments within the university also are examined. Students who had not elected a major tended to have a significantly poorer retention rate, about 7 percentage points below average. Analysis of retention rates of freshmen according to credit load indicates that the number of credits carried is strongly related to student retention: the highest rates of retention occurred for freshmen who carried 18-20 credits. Retention rates are analyzed in relation to age, grade point average, rank in high school class, and place of residence within the state. Diagrams illustrating student flow or progression are presented, and the value of computerized simulation to project enrollment patterns is noted. Additionally, the relationship between inflow and outflow is considered. (SW)

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Student Retention at UW-Oshkosh

April 1981

(Update of April, 1980 Edition)

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

OSHKOSH

Planning Report

One of a series of reports informing the implementation of planned change at UW-Oshkosh

Units [illegible] Planning Office
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HE014543

STUDENT RETENTION AT UW-OSHKOSH

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STUDENT RETENTION AT UW-OSHKOSH

Introduction

This report, an update of a similar report published in April, 1980, summarizes the major attributes of the data describing student retention (and its converse - attrition) at UW-Oshkosh.. With the advent of computer-based registration in 1975, the University gained access to a wealth of information describing the enrollment, re-enrollment, and drop-out patterns of its students. To this time, we have restricted our study of patterns of retention to undergraduate students, and this report reflects that restricted focus. The next retention report will be published in April, 1982.

Definitions and Technical Considerations

The basic technique used to develop these data consist of comparing the information on the "official" registration tapes for any two fall semesters. The two fall semester data files are stored in the computer, and a computer program matches student identification numbers found on the earliest of the data storage tapes with those on the latter. Students are classified into three primary groups depending on whether they are found *(i)* only on the first tape (these are losses: dropouts or graduations), *(ii)* on both tapes (continuing students), or *(iii)* only on the second tape (these are gains: transfers, readmits, or new students).

Occasional changes in identification numbers (e.g., foreign students are often assigned a temporary number by the Admissions Office until they are granted their permanent number) do not significantly affect the statistics that are derived from these matches.

Each student identification number carries with it information about the enrollee such as number of credits carried, ethnic preference, class standing, date of college graduation, major field, age, cumulative grade point average, high school rank, and home county. Each of these variables is used in the study to describe and analyze the retention phenomena in one way or another.

Throughout this study, attrition is defined as the percentage of those undergraduate students who were enrolled during an initial fall semester but who neither *(i)* re-enrolled during the following fall semester nor *(ii)* graduated in the intervening spring or summer semester. Also, for purposes of analysis, we have elected to focus on the positive rather than negative aspect of attrition. For example, rather than describing attrition of a class of freshmen as 25%, we have chosen to describe their <u>retention</u> as 75%.

The University Goal

One of the institution-wide goals established a six-year time period for the University's efforts to increase retention. This report is intended to provide a framework for evaluating (at least partially) progress toward achieving that goal.

The goal statement is as follows:

> THE UNIVERSITY WILL STRENGTHEN ITS RETENTION OF STUDENTS:
>
> A. BY INCREASING THE RETENTION RATE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN BY ONE POINT FIVE PERCENT (1.5%) PER YEAR FOR EACH OF THE NEXT SIX YEARS.
>
> B. BY IMPROVING (BY 1986) THE RATIO OF DEGREE COMPLETIONS TO MATRICULATIONS BY TEN PERCENT (10%).
>
> C. BY INCREASING THE RETENTION LEVEL OF RECOGNIZED MINORITY GROUPS.

Establishing base line data for this goal requires that several definitions be adopted.

a. Full-time - an undergraduate student enrolled for 12 or more credits during the first fall semester of the two being compared. These credits need not be associated with courses having grades that contribute to grade point average (e.g., pass/fail).

b. Freshman - an undergraduate student who has earned fewer than 30 credits as of the beginning of the first of two fall semesters being compared.

c. Degree completion - an undergraduate student who was enrolled as a freshman during an initial fall semester and who was granted graduation status at some time after the end of the initial semester but before the beginning of a fall semester five years later.

d. Matriculation - a UW-Oshkosh freshman enrolled for credit.

e. Minority student - an undergraduate student who, at registration, (*i*) specifies an ethnic group other than caucasion and (*ii*) is not a foreign student.

With these definitions in mind, the following charts display the essential features of the retention picture for UW-Oshkosh undergraduate students. A brief explanatory narrative may be found with each figure.

Figure 1

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATES OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN
FROM FIVE DIFFERENT CLASSES, 1975 THROUGH 1979
WITH PROJECTIONS THROUGH 1986

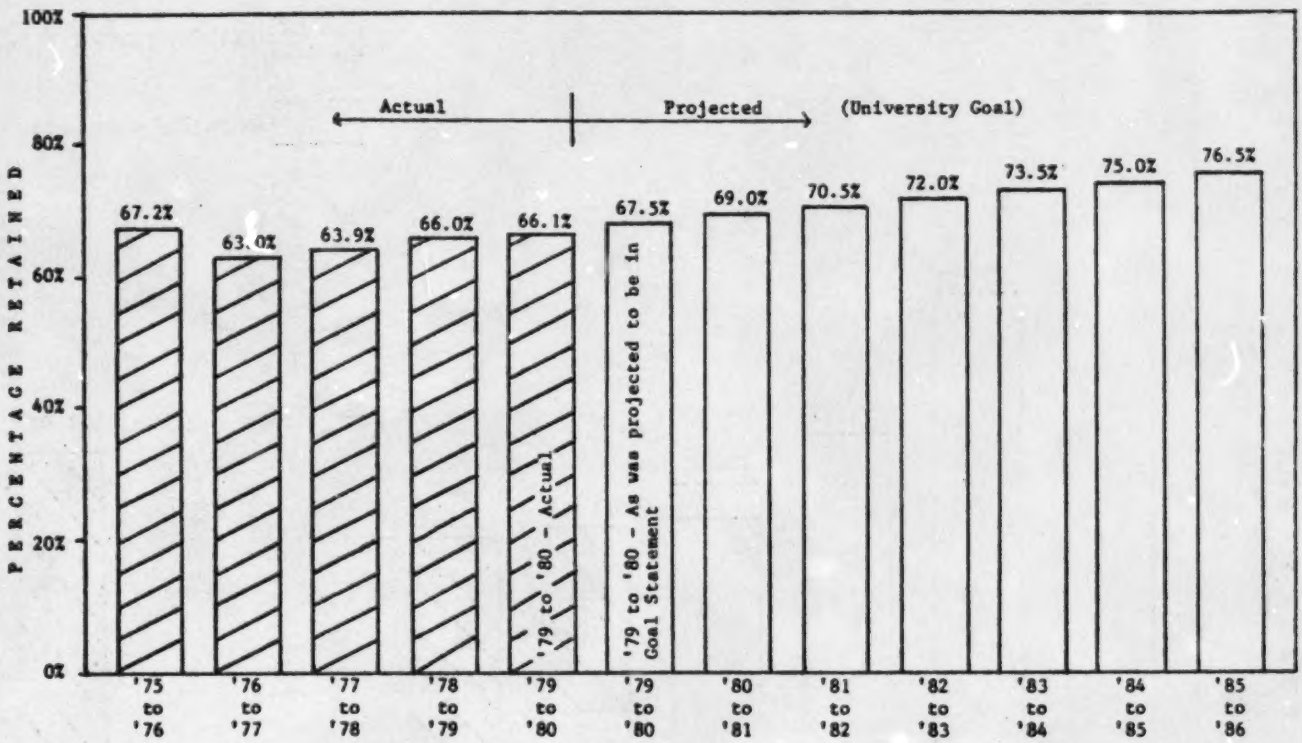


Figure 1 displays the actual retention rate of approximately 2,400 to 2,600 full-time freshmen for each of the past 5 years and displays the projected effects of achieving the institutional goal each year until 1986. It should be noted that each bar represents a different freshman class. Retention increased by only .1 of 1% in 1980 as compared to just over 2% in 1979. Retention, however, has been increasing, albeit slowly, the past four years. The goal states that retention will increase by 1½% per year for the next six years. If this is accomplished, retention for the freshman class of 1985 will be improved to 76.5% or more than 10% above the present level of 66.1%.

The importance of the goal for improving the retention rate of freshmen can be better appreciated by tracing its effect through four or five years of enrollment. For example, if 200 more full-time freshmen had been retained each of the last four fall semesters, the effect would be that the total Fall, 1980 enrollment would be approximately 600 full-time students higher (attrition accounts for 200 students). These 600 "New" students would generate about 9000 student credit hours which would translate into roughly 17 full-time instructional positions, given historical annual teaching loads of approximately 530 student credit hours per instructor. The figure would be even greater if retention rates for sophomores (which tend to be about 10 percentage points above that of freshmen) and juniors were also improved.

Figure 2

PERCENTAGE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL, 1975, WHO HAD EITHER
(1) GRADUATED PRIOR TO OR (2) RE-ENROLLED DURING SUBSEQUENT FALL SEMESTERS

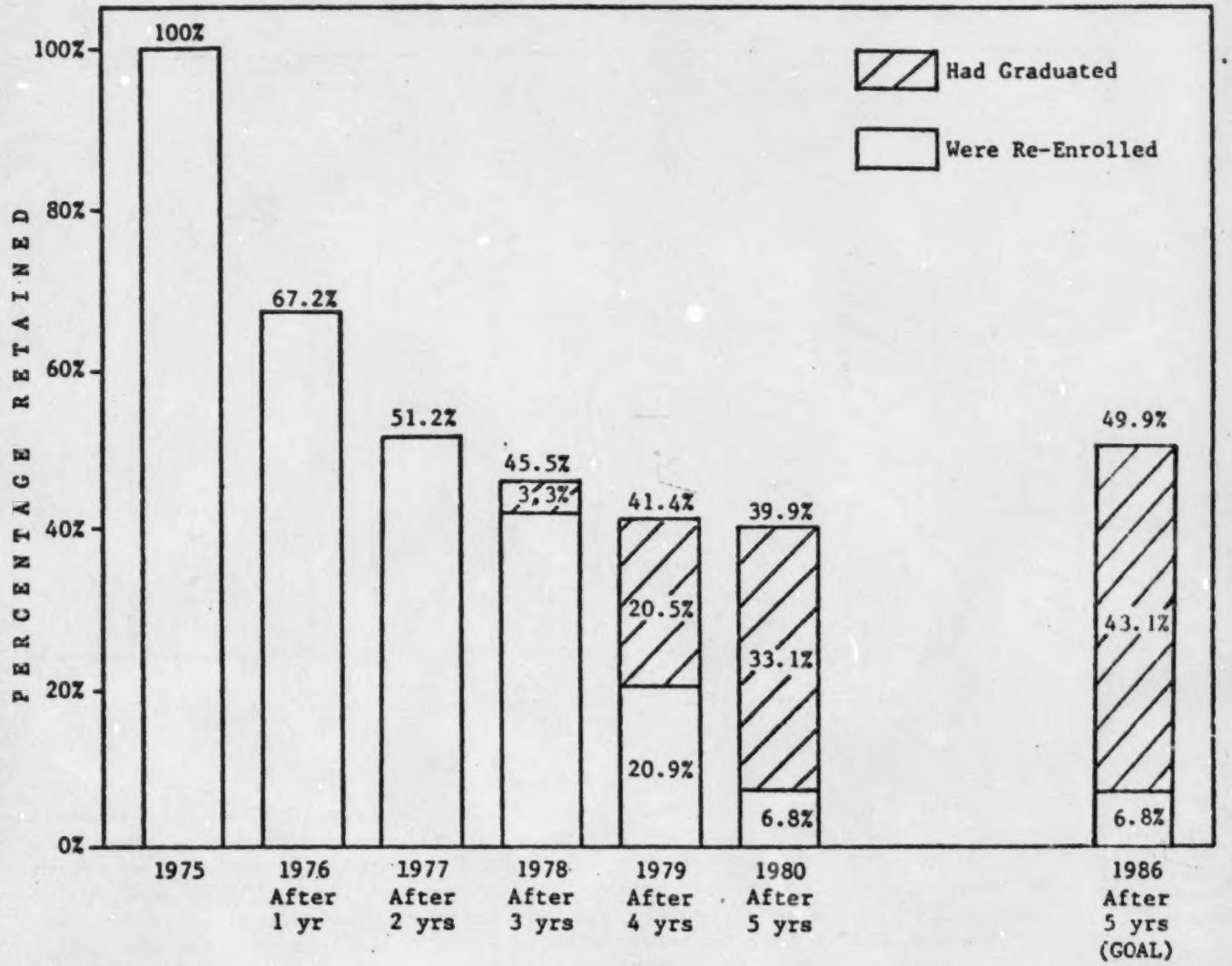


Figure 2 traces the full-time students of the Fall, 1975 freshmen class through 5 years of enrollment. After one year, 67.2% were re-enrolled; after 2 years, 51.2% were still enrolled. After 3 years, however, about 4 in 10 of the original group were left. Also, by this time, 3.3% had graduated. By the next year, 1979, after 4 academic years and 4 summer semesters had elapsed, only 20.5% of the original group had graduated; 20.9% were still enrolled. By Fall, 1980, an additional 12.6% of the original group of full-time Fall, 1975 freshmen had graduated, bringing the total to 33.1%. The 33.1% represents the number of students who had graduated within an elapsed time of 5 academic years. An additional 6.8% were still enrolled in 1980.

It is expected that very few of those still enrolled in 1980 will drop out; in fact, most will graduate some time during the year.

The effect of the goal "to improve (by 1986) the ratio of matriculations to graduations by 10%" is shown by the last bar in the graph. The effect will be, by 1986, to raise the percentage of graduates after 5 years have elapsed, from the current level of 33.1% to 43.1%.

Figure 3

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATES OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN MINORITY STUDENTS FROM FIVE DIFFERENT CLASSES, 1975 THROUGH 1979

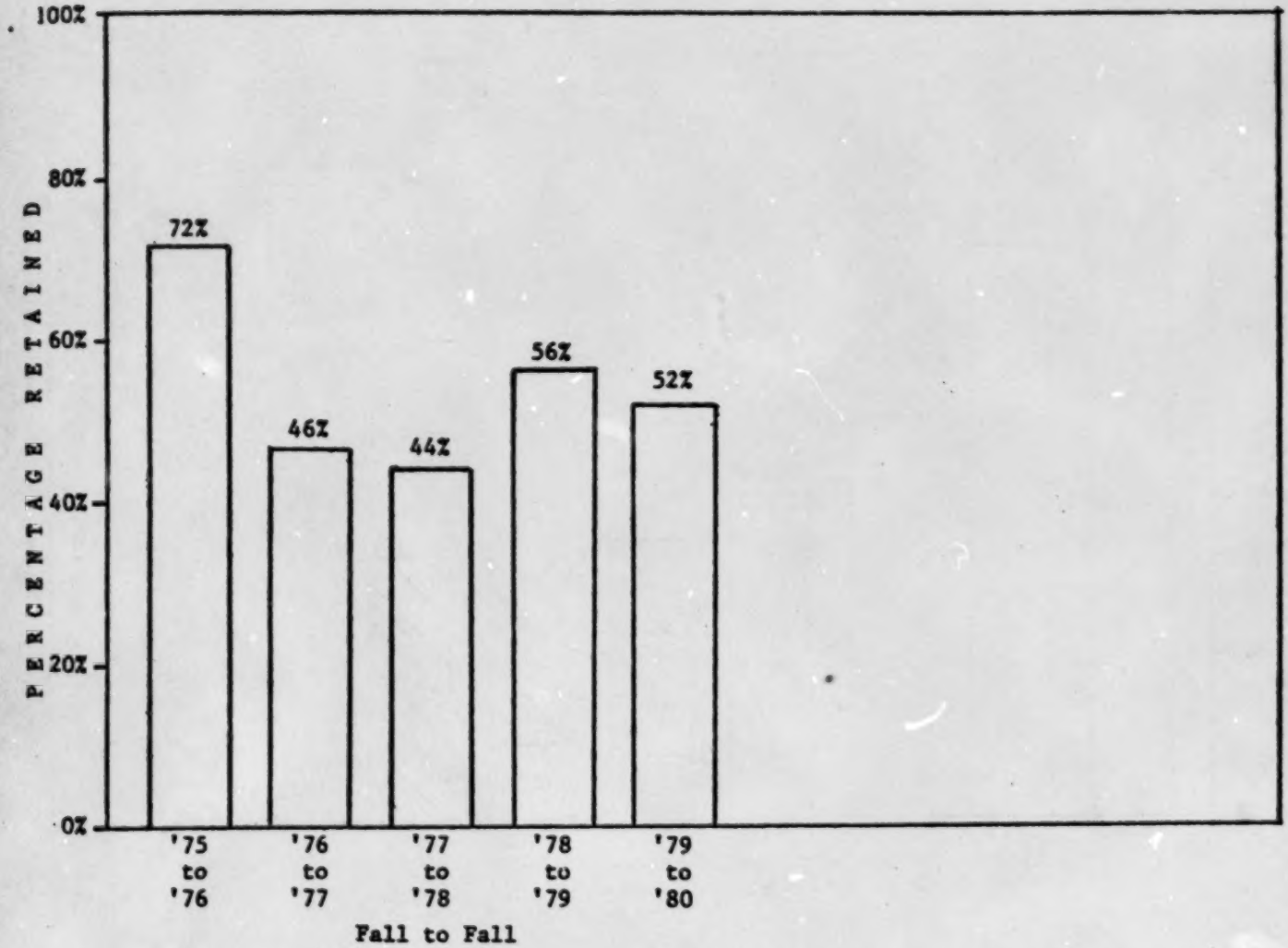


Figure 3 is similar to Figure 1 except that it has been limited to freshmen minority students. Although no specific percentage goal has been suggested for minority students, it is intended that "the University will strengthen its retention of students by increasing the retention level of recognized minority groups". Figure 3 shows that the retention rates of the last three freshman classes of full-time minority students have ranged from 44% to 56%. Corresponding percentages for all full-time freshmen are 64% to 66% respectively. Approximately 140 full-time freshmen minority students attended UW-Oshkosh during Fall, 1980.

Figure 4

PERCENTAGE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN MINORITIES, FALL, 1975, WHO HAD EITHER (1) GRADUATED PRIOR TO OR (2) RE-ENROLLED DURING SUBSEQUENT FALL SEMESTERS

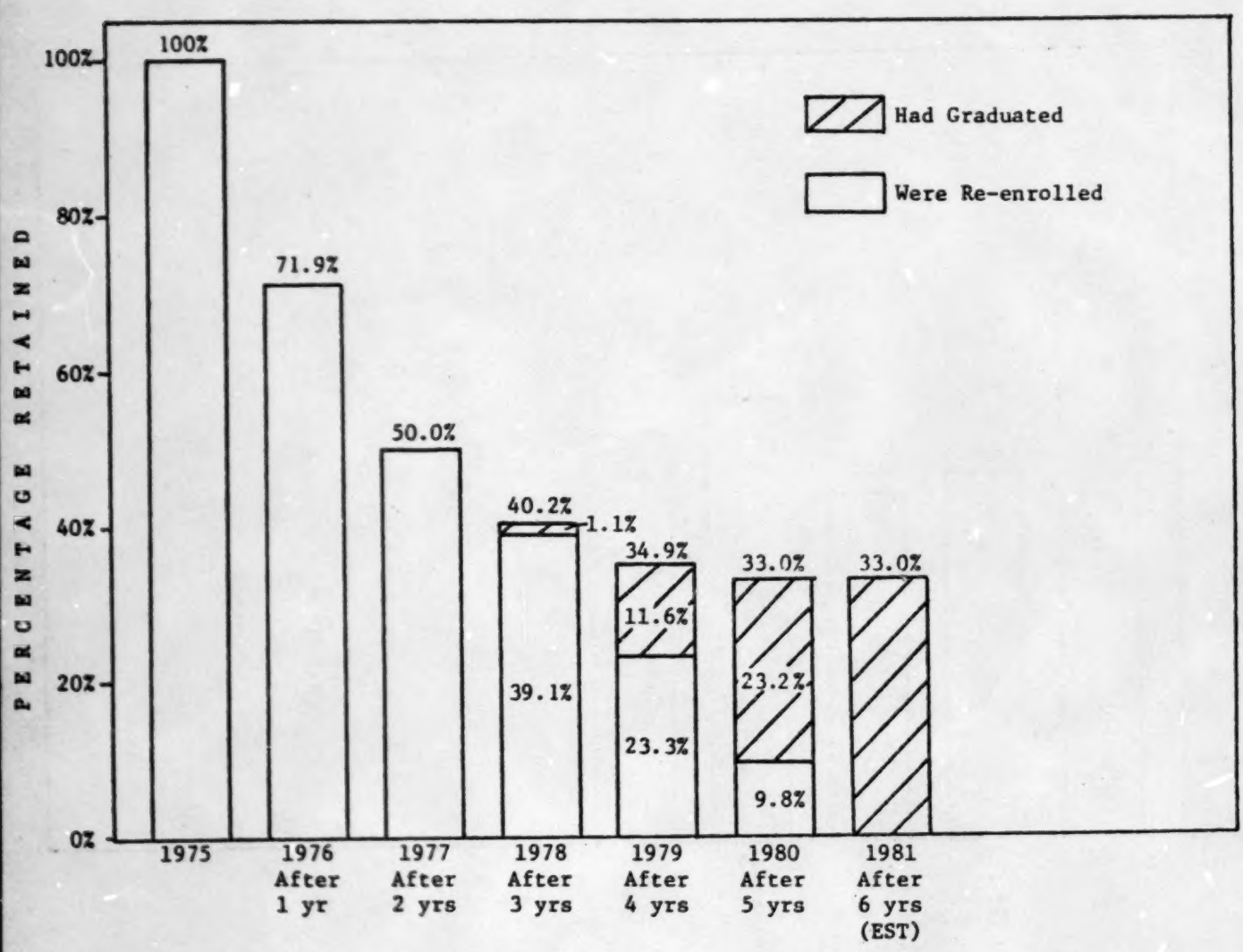


Figure 4 is similar to Figure 2 except that the initial group consists of full-time freshmen minority students rather than all full-time freshmen. The retention rate through four years is somewhat lower than that for all full-time freshmen. After four years had elapsed, only 11.6% had graduated, compared to 20.5% for all full-time students who were enrolled as freshmen in 1975. By 1980, after 5 years had elapsed, 9.8%, were continuing their studies compared to 6.8% for all full-time freshmen (figure 2). Twenty-three percent had graduated by Fall, 1980, compared to 33% for all full-time freshmen. It should be noted that while the retention rate for five different classes of full-time freshmen remained reasonably stable (figure 1), this has not been the case for full-time minority freshmen. Their retention rate dropped from 72% in Fall, 1976 to 44% in Fall, 1978. The retention rate was 52% in Fall, 1980 (figure 3). Consequently, if the table above were replicated for full-time minority freshmen in 1976, the five year follow-through would compare more unfavorably with a similar table of all full-time freshmen students.

Figure 5

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATES OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN
FROM THREE DIFFERENT CLASSES, 1977 THROUGH 1979
BY PROGRAM AREA

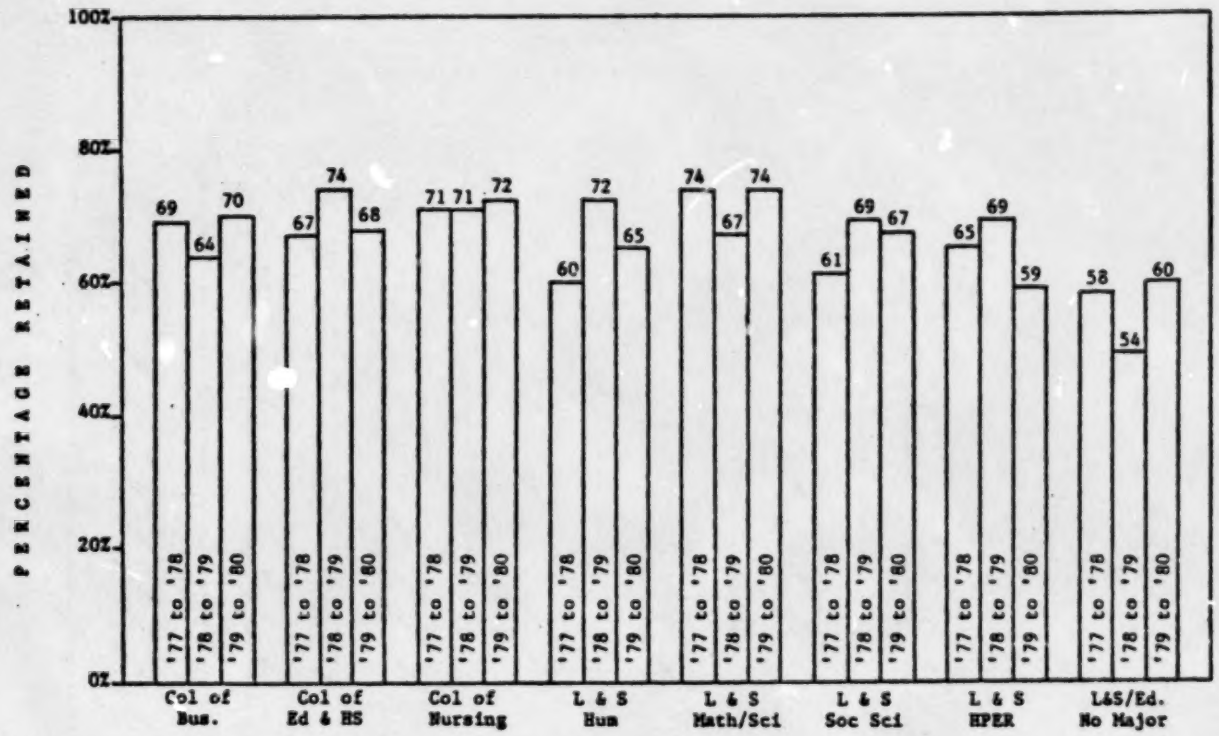


Figure 5 displays one year retention rates for three different freshmen classes (full-time students) who have majors in the several broad program areas of the University. The three professional schools are shown as a whole while the College of Letters and Science is broken out by division. Clearly, the College of Nursing shows the steadiest rates of retention over the three years (71%-72%). With the exception of Nursing majors, it does not seem that choice of broad program bears a strong relationship to likelihood of retention, although it does appear that students who choose technical areas, such as Business, Nursing, and Math/Science tend to be more likely to continue. Students who have not selected a major, however, tend to have a significantly poorer retention rate, about 7 percentage points below average.

Figure 6

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATES OF FRESHMEN FROM 1978 TO 1979 AND 1979 TO 1980 ACCORDING TO CREDIT LOAD

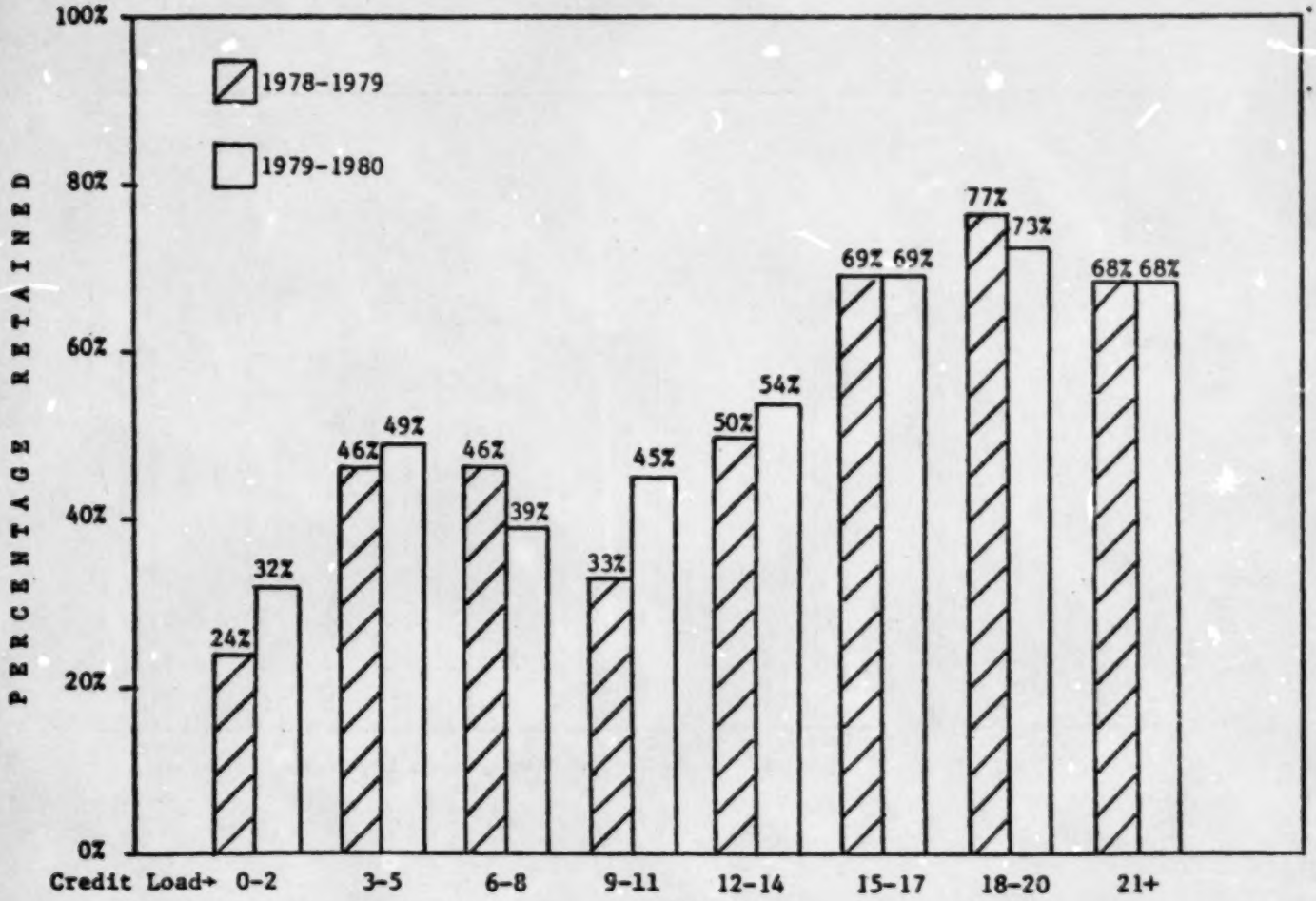


Figure 6 shows decisively, although not surprisingly, that the number of credits carried is strongly related to student retention. The highest rates of retention, 77% in Fall, 1979 and 73% in Fall, 1980 belong to freshmen who carried 18-20 credits. The lowest rate, 24% in Fall, 1979 and 32% in Fall, 1980, is for those freshmen who took only one or two credits. This group accounted for only 3% of the Freshman class during Fall, 1978 and 1% during Fall, 1979, however. Eighty-seven percent of the Freshman class, or over 2,400 students, carry 12 or more credits. Somewhat surprisingly, students who take one course (3-5 credits) tend to be more likely to return the following fall than students enrolled in 0-2 credits or 6-11 credits. There is a significant jump (68% to 73% during Fall, 1980) for students whose credit load exceeds 14. Note that this graph displays data for two different freshmen classes, Fall, 1978 and Fall, 1979.

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATES OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN
1978 TO 1979 AND 1979 TO 1980
ACCORDING TO AGE RANGE

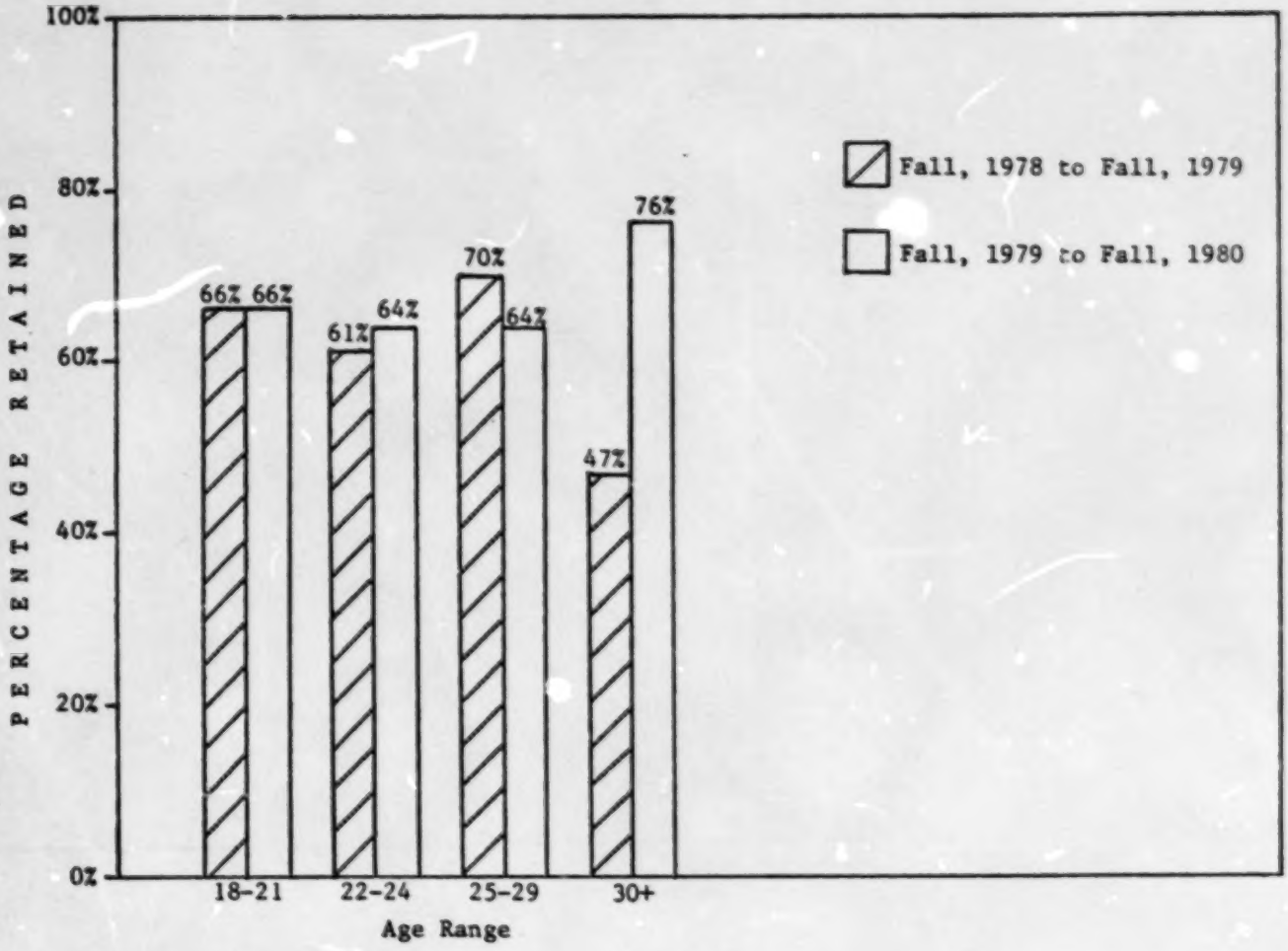
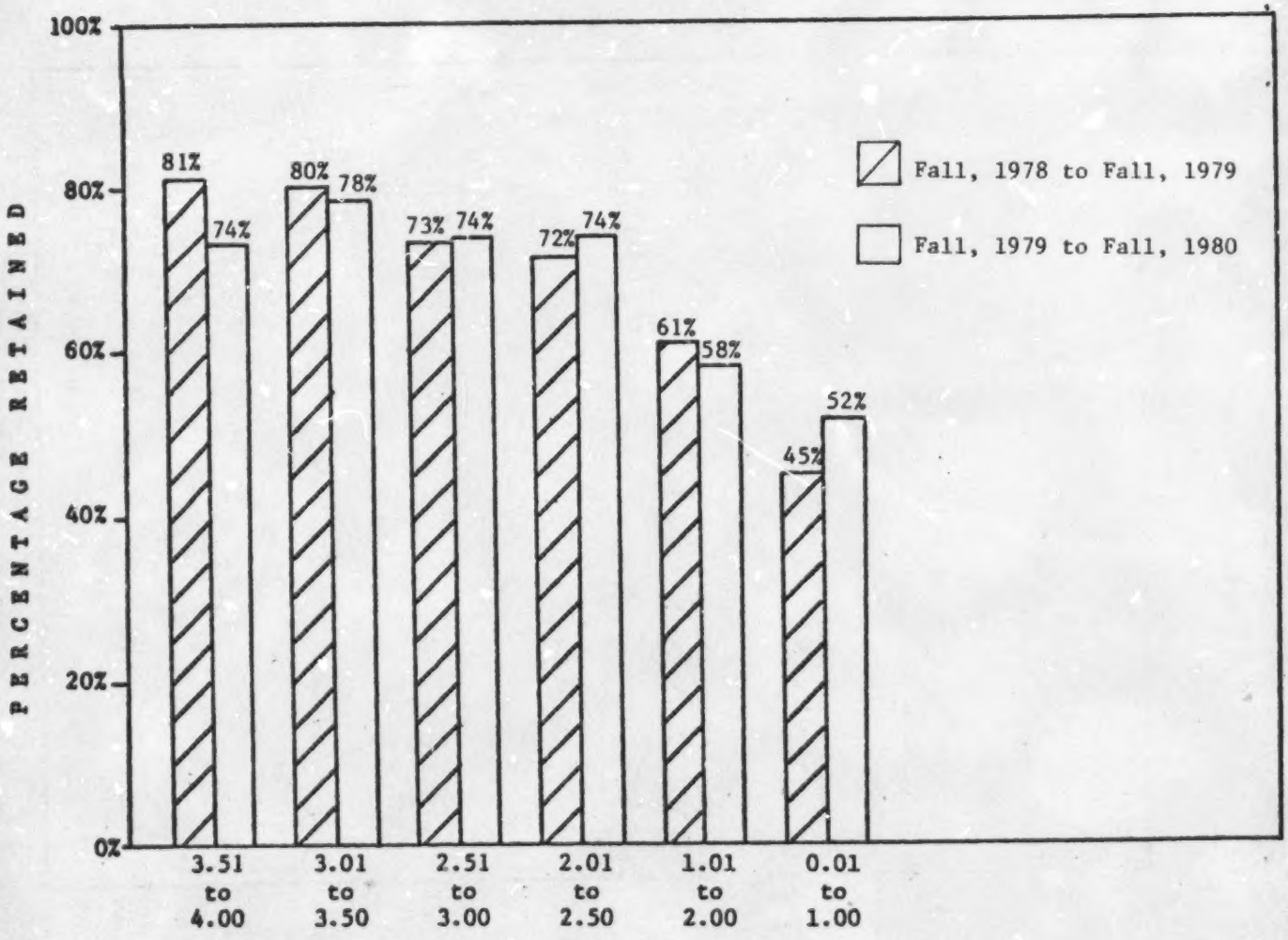


Figure 7 displays retention rates for two classes: full-time freshmen, Fall, 1978 and Fall, 1979, according to age range. Most full-time freshmen (90%, or about 2,200) can be found in the 18-21 age range where the retention rate is about the same as for all full-time freshmen. During Fall, 1979, there were about 90 full-time freshmen in the 22-24 range, 50 in the 25-29 range, and 50 in the 30+ range.

Figure 8

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATES OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN
1978 TO 1979 AND 1979 TO 1980
ACCORDING TO CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE*



The relationship between cumulative grade point average and student retention for both years shown in the graph is positive. Although there tends to be a leveling above a 2.00 average, the range in Fall, 1980 is 74% for full-time freshmen with a 2.01-2.50 average to 78% for students in the 3.01-3.50 range. Retention falls off markedly as grade point average falls below passing; 58% for the 1.01-2.00 GPA range to 52% for those earning less than a 1.01 average. Retention also falls off slightly for students who earn above a 3.50 GPA. Approximately 6% of full-time freshmen (N=149 in 1979) fall into the 0.01-1.00 GPA group where an additional 28% are in the 1.01-2.00 group. One hundred five Fall, 1979 full-time freshmen earned a zero GPA; 8 were enrolled the following fall. Approximately 15% of the UW-Oshkosh full-time freshmen enrolled in 1979 had more than a 3.00 GPA by the following fall.

* GPA - Computed as of the beginning of Fall, 1979 for the Fall '78 to Fall '79 class and at the beginning of Fall, 1980 for the Fall '79 to Fall '80 class.

Figure 9

FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN
1978 TO 1979 AND 1979 TO 1980
ACCORDING TO RANK IN HIGH SCHOOL CLASS

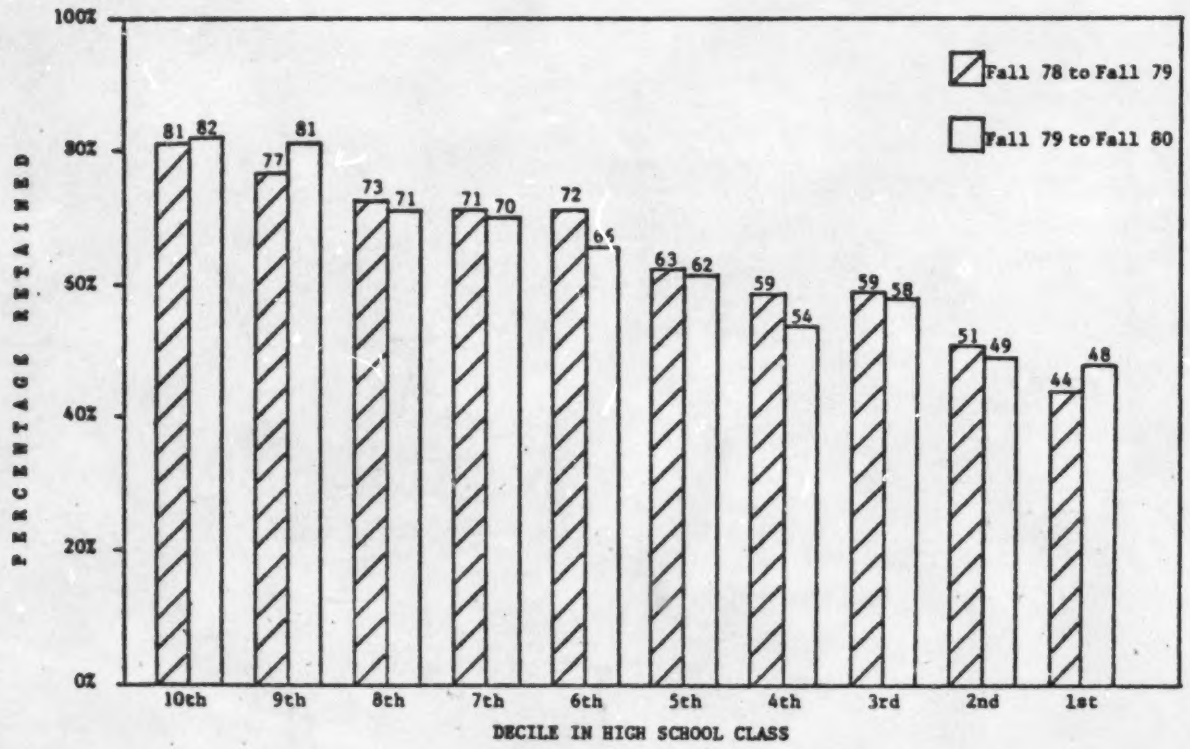


Figure 9 is similar to Figure 8 in that it relates student retention to academic achievement. This graph shows that the highest level of retention, 81-82%, can be expected from full-time freshmen who graduate in the upper 20% of their high school class. It does not appear, however, that placement in the 60th-89th percentiles (6th-8th deciles) makes a significant difference with regard to retention - the range is 5%. A significant drop occurs when full-time freshmen fall into or below the 50th percentile. The lowest rate of retention, 48%, is for freshmen who rank in the lowest 10% of their high school class. Retention in Fall, 1980, as compared to Fall, 1979 decreased except at the 1st, 9th, and 10th decile.

Among those UW-Oshkosh full-time freshmen for whom data was available, approximately 60% of full-time Fall, 1979 freshmen ranked above the 50th percentile in high school; 40% ranked below the 50th percentile. Approximately 15% of full-time freshmen in 1979 are excluded from these figures due to missing rank in class information.

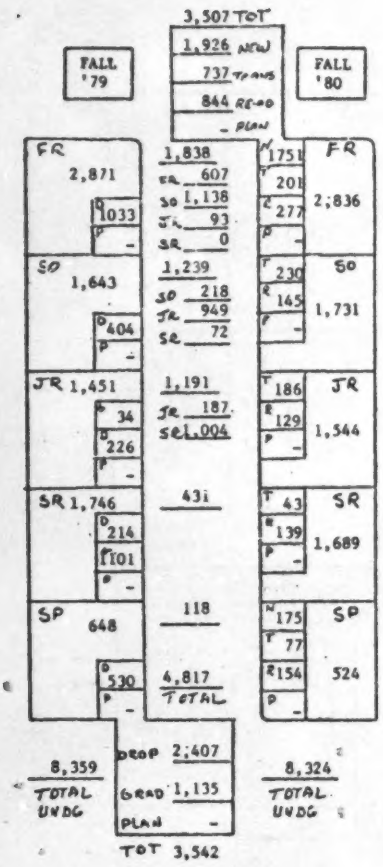
FALL TO FALL RETENTION RATE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN
1978 COMPARED TO 1979 AND 1979 COMPARED TO 1980
ACCORDING TO STATE REGION

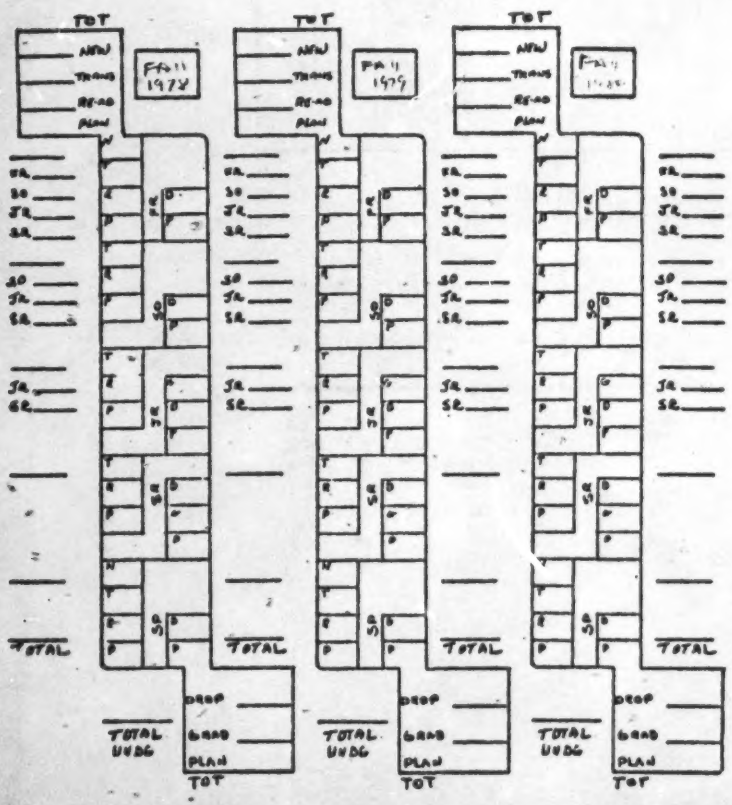
Figure 10

Figure 10, a map of Wisconisn divided into 7 regional marketing areas, shows the highest retention rate, 70% for full-time freshmen in 1980, in the North Central area. During the previous Fall, the best retention rate (75%) was from District 1 which includes Waushara, Manitowoc, Oconto, Marinette, and Florence counties. This area was assigned to Oshkosh (with some sharing by UW-SP and UW-GB) by System Administration as primary service area for offering off-campus instruction. The other areas, including counties adjacent to Winnebago, are remarkably similar, for 1980 around 67%. The exception is the Milwaukee region where the rate is 61%, down 3% from the retention rate for Fall, 1979. Approximately 60% of UW-Oshkosh full-time freshmen in Fall, 1980 came from the Milwaukee District and the Winnebago County District.

UW-OSHKOSH STUDENT FLOW

FALL, 1979 TO FALL, 1930





The figure found on the left shows how students move from one fall semester to the next.

The undergraduate population is divided into five groups: Freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and a category called special students. Special students are those who are not registered in a formal degree program.

There are four different numbers associated with each class cell:

1. The total number of students (head count) in the cell for that semester.
2. The number of students who leave the university without graduating. (Dropouts)
3. The number of graduates. (Graduated)
4. The number who continue to the next fall semester.

The number who continue from one fall to the next are separated into those who progress into the next highest cell (e.g., freshman progresses to sophomore) and those who did not earn enough credits to progress to a higher cell (e.g., freshman to freshman) and, finally, those who progress at an accelerated pace (e.g., freshman to junior).

The outflow numbers (e.g., dropped and continued) tend to be rather stable from year to year. For example, the dropout rate for freshmen varies only 5% in five years, from a low in Fall, 1979 of 36%, to a high in Fall, 1976 of 41%. The dropout rate tends to decline as the student progresses. For seniors, the dropout rate was 12% in Fall, 1979.

The chart at the bottom was included to demonstrate how several years are combined to produce an historical estimate of student flow.

Simulation of Student Flow

The next 2 pages display the same numbers found in the student flow diagram above and, in addition, convert attrition figures to probabilities. Similar displays are available by college dating back to Fall, 1975. The value of the computerized simulation model lies in its ability to project enrollment patterns after being fed various assumptions about the future. For example, the question of how more stringent admissions standards will effect college enrollment can be explored. Multiple effects, such as a 5% decrease in attrition for sophomores and juniors coupled with a 10% increase in transfers and a 7% increase in new students can be explored.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN OSHKOSH
DISPLAY OF HISTORY FILE & PROBABILITIES
FALL SEMESTER - 1979

	FRESHMAN	SOPHOMORE	JUNIOR	SENIOR	SPECIAL
TRANSFER					
READMIT					
PLAN IN					
1979 TOTAL	2871	1643	1451	1746	648
NEW					276
DROP OUT	1033/0.360+	404/0.246	226/0.156	214/0.122	530/0.818
PLAN OUT					
FRESHMAN#	607/0.211				
SOPHOMORE#	1138/0.396	218/0.133			
JUNIOR#	93/0.032	949/0.578	187/0.129		
SENIOR#		72/0.044	1004/0.691	431/0.247	
GRADUATE*			34/0.023	1101/0.630	
SPECIAL#					118/0.182

Continuing students, i.e., 607 freshmen in Fall, 1979 continued in Fall, 1980 as freshmen, 1138 progressed to sophomore, etc.
* Graduated
+ i.e., 36.0% of freshmen enrolled during Fall, 1979 did not return during Fall, 1980.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN OSHKOSH
DISPLAY OF HISTORY FILE & PROBABILITIES
FALL SEMESTER - 1980

	FRESHMAN	SOPHOMORE	JUNIOR	SENIOR	SPECIAL
TRANSFER	201	230	186	43	77
READMIT	277	145	129	139	154
PLAN IN					
1980 TOTAL	2836	1731	1544	1689	524
NEW	1751				175

The following retention-related information is presented in order to show the relationship between "inflow" and "outflow". There are four sources by which a college may receive students: (1) new students - freshmen who have had no previous college experience, (2) transfers from other institutions, (3) re-admitted students, and (4) students who change their majors. There are three sources of student loss or "outflow": (1) students who graduate, (2) students who dropout, and (3) students who change their majors.

The relationship between inflow and outflow is rather direct - enrollment is increased by reducing the losses due to attrition. For example, if the College of Letters and Science could have reduced freshmen attrition in Fall, 1979 from 682 to 500, then 182 students would be added to their Fall, 1980 freshmen enrollment of 1,762 for a new total of 1,944.

ATTRITION STATISTICS BY COLLEGE

FALL, 1979 AND FALL, 1980

	MAJORS			
	BUS	NRS	L&S	COEHS
FRESHMEN (0-29 Credits)				
INFLOW (1980)				
New Student	+366	+174	+1055	+156
Transfer & Readmit	+113	+ 39	+ 288	+ 38
Via Major Change[1]	+ 17	+ 4	+ 57	+ 29
Continuing[2]	+ 72	+ 30	+ 362	+ 36
Total	+568	+247	+1762	+259
OUTFLOW (1979)				
Dropout[3]	-201	- 70	- 682	- 80
Via Major Change[1]	- 54	- 9	- 38	- 6
Total	-255	- 79	- 720	- 86
SOPHOMORE (30-59 Credits)				
INFLOW (1980)				
Transfer & Readmit	+ 81	+ 56	+ 209	+ 29
Via Major Change[1]	+ 45	+ 11	+ 83	+ 40
Continuing[2]	+277	+121	+ 683	+ 96
Total	+403	+188	+ 975	+165
OUTFLOW (1979)				
Dropout[3]	- 72	- 62	- 238	- 32
Via Major Change[1]	- 63	- 16	- 84	- 16
Total	-135	- 78	- 322	- 48
JUNIORS				
INFLOW (1980)				
Transfer & Readmit	+ 84	+ 38	+ 162	+ 31
Via Major Change[1]	+ 15	+ 5	+ 59	+ 6
Continuing[2]	+266	+164	+ 591	+120
Total	+365	+207	+ 812	+157
OUTFLOW (1979)				
Dropout[3]	- 48	- 22	- 131	- 25
Via Major Change[1]	- 46	- 7	- 17	- 15
Graduations	- 9	- 1	- 23	- 1
Total	-103	- 30	- 171	- 41

ATTRITION STATISTICS BY COLLEGE (cont)

FALL, 1979 AND FALL, 1980

	MAJORS			
	BUS	NRS	L&S	COEHS
SENIORS				
INFLOW (1980)				
Transfer & Readmit	+ 33	+ 27	+ 101	+ 21
Via Major Change[1]	+ 7	+ 0	+ 17	+ 8
Continuing[2]	+303	+193	+ 781	+201
Total	+343	+220	+ 899	+230
OUTFLOW (1979)				
Dropout[3]	- 34	- 20	- 145	- 15
Via Major Change[1]	- 5	- 10	- 11	- 6
Graduations	-243	-128	- 591	-139
Total	-282	-158	- 747	-160

[1] Students who changed from one college to another between Fall, 1979 and Fall, 1980.

[2] Freshmen: Includes Fall, 1979 freshmen who continue in 1980 as freshmen.
Sophomore: Includes Fall, 1979 freshmen who progress to sophomore by Fall, 1980 as well as Fall, 1979 sophomores who continue in Fall, 1980 as sophomores.
Junior: Includes freshmen and sophomores in Fall, 1979 who earn sufficient credits to become juniors in 1980 as well as juniors in Fall, 1979 who continue as juniors in Fall, 1980.
Senior: Includes sophomores and juniors in Fall, 1979 who earn sufficient credits to become seniors in Fall, 1980 as well as seniors in Fall, 1979 who continue as seniors in Fall, 1980.

[3] Students who were enrolled during Fall, 1979 but neither graduated nor re-enrolled by Fall, 1980